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C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAMA 001366

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [BA](#) [REGION](#) [CTR](#) [POL](#) [REFORM](#)  
SUBJECT: BAHRAINI SHIA MPS URGE CONTINUED EMBASSY ROLE

Classified By: CDA Susan L. Ziadeh for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

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Summary  
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¶1. (C) Shia MPs Mohamed Al Alshaikh and Shaikh Abdulla Al A'ali met with the Ambassador July 24 and urged the Embassy to continue to support Bahrain's democratic reform. Shaikh Abdulla expressed the wish they could have accomplished more for the people, but said that their four years of service have been a good experience in the democratic process. The MPs requested that the Ambassador urge GOB officials to ensure that the fall parliamentary and municipal elections are fair and legitimate, and the Ambassador assured them that he would be vocal on such issues leading up to the elections. Shaikh Abdulla also expressed his desire that the Embassy assist in minimizing conflict between Sunni and Shia in Bahrain. Al Alshaikh said that the recently passed counterterrorism (CT) legislation gives the GOB too much authority and opens the door to abuse of the public's basic human rights. Finally the MPs expressed concern that the U.S. is not doing enough to resolve the conflict in Lebanon and that a resolution is more likely if the issues of Sheba Farms and Hizballah prisoners held by Israel were part of the negotiations. End summary.

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Importance of Embassy Support for Democracy  
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¶2. (C) During a meeting with the Ambassador July 24, Shia MPs Mohamed Abdulla Al Alshaikh and Shaikh Abdulla Ja'afer Al A'ali, the only Shia cleric currently in the 40-member Council of Representatives (COR), urged that the Embassy continue to support the democratic reform process in Bahrain. Shaikh Abdulla said that the past four years in the COR have been a good experience in the democratic process, even though due to several conservative MPs, the COR was not able to do as much as it would have liked. The Ambassador stated that even though Bahrain's democracy was not perfect, over the four years it was clear that the COR had matured and each year's work was better than the previous year's. He said democracy is an ongoing process, and even in the U.S.'s 230-year-old democracy there have been debates in recent months about the power of the executive branch relative to the legislative branch.

¶3. (C) The MPs suggested the Ambassador use opportunities to urge GOB officials to ensure that the upcoming elections are fair and legitimate. The Ambassador assured them that he uses any opportunity to do so and will be vocal on these issues, including the advantages to allowing independent observers, as we approach the elections. The MPs also asked for any support that would encourage GOB officials to assist,

and the public to choose, qualified, experienced MPs in order to enhance the quality of the COR and the democratic experience in Bahrain.

¶4. (C) Shaikh Abdulla also suggested that the Embassy do what it can to minimize conflict between the Sunni and Shia communities in Bahrain. Conflicts in the COR between Sunni and Shia MPs have a spill-over effect into the community, and the (Sunni) "ruling family will always be on the side of the Sunnis." He urged the Ambassador to stress the need for unity whenever possible.

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Objections to New Terror Law  
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¶5. (C) The second item on their agenda was the recently passed CT legislation, which was fiercely opposed by 10 MPs, including Al Alshaikh and Shaikh Abdulla. Al Alshaikh said that the main objection was that the new law gives the GOB too much authority to detain individuals. (Note: There is some anxiety, especially in the Shia community, that the GOB will abuse this authority, as was perceived to be the case in the 1990's, under the Emergency State Security Law. That law was repealed in 2002. End note.) Al Alshaikh stated that the potential exists for the GOB to enforce the law inconsistently, harder on the Shia than on Sunnis. The GOB has used the anti-terror law to, according to Al Alshaikh, slip in crimes that do not fit as acts of terrorism. Shaikh Abdulla added that the new law will affect the rights of the people including freedom of expression.

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Concern on Lebanon/Hizballah  
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¶6. (C) The third issue they wanted to raise was the ongoing conflict in Lebanon. Expressing concern about developments there, Shaikh Abdulla asked that the U.S. be more actively engaged to resolve the conflict. He expressed confidence that a resolution could be reached if the issues of Sheba Farms and Hizballah prisoners currently held in Israel were a part of the package. Then, he said, it would be possible to disarm Hizballah.

¶7. (C) Shaikh Abdulla related a personal story of a trip he took to Iraq to visit Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq Ayatollah Mohamed Al Hakim and then to Lebanon to visit Hizballah leader Sayed Hasan Nasrallah. Al Hakim asked Shaikh Abdulla to deliver a personal message to Nasrallah, requesting that Nasrallah stop criticizing Al Hakim for working with the U.S., because the Americans were doing good work for them in Iraq. Shaikh Abdulla said that Nasrallah responded that he would not stop criticizing the U.S., because, in his eyes, anything the U.S. did was bad. On the subject of Iraq, both Shaikh Abdulla and Al Alshaikh expressed their support of the removal of Saddam Hussein and the opportunity for Shia in Iraq to participate in the government.

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Comment  
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¶8. (C) At a time when even those who support democratic reform or U.S. democracy programming in Bahrain are distancing themselves from the USG because of Lebanon, it was surprising that two Shia MPs approached us urging U.S. support for democracy in the run-up to this fall's parliamentary elections. This in fact reflects their precarious positions as Shia who went against the Al Wifaq boycott in 2002 and will face a serious challenge retaining their seats in 2006 now that Al Wifaq is participating. Significantly, they asked that the meeting be kept confidential, and did not raise the issue of NDI. On the CT

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law, they reflected the concerns of Shia and many liberals

that the law was too broad and that it gives power to the government to crack down on opposition as it sees fit.

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